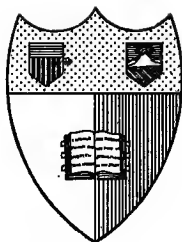


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H. B. Wheatley Esq.  
With the Editor's kind regards.

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25 June. 1884.

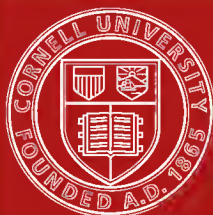
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Shakespeare's grave. Notes of traditions



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## SHAKESPEARE'S GRAVE.



Shakespeare's Grave.

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NOTES OF TRADITIONS

THAT WERE

CURRENT AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON,

IN THE

LATTER PART OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY,

Now first printed from the original Manuscript preserved  
in the Bodleian Library.

cu  
William Hall  
=

---

She clepes him king of graves, and grave for kings,  
Imperious supreme of all mortal things.

*Venus and Adonis.*

---

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FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY.

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1884.

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CB





## PREFACE.

The Rev. W. D. Macray has recently discovered in the Bodleian Library an old letter of considerable Shakespearean interest, and, in his well-known anxiety to assist those literary enquirers who are engaged in special lines of research, has kindly forwarded me a copy of it. The manuscript is undated, but "that it was written," observes Mr. Macray, "about the beginning of December, 1694, appears from a subsequent letter which contains *the Staffordshire words*, and which is dated at Lichfield, January the 2nd, 1694-5."

Early traditional notices of Shakespeare are of such excessive rarity that incessant research amongst the multitudinous records of England have heretofore disclosed only four manuscripts of the kind belonging to the seventeenth century. The present discovery adds a fifth, but unfortunately it follows the brevity of its predecessors.

But yet, in one signal respect, this lately discovered manuscript of 1694 is the most important of the series,—it is the only one in which there is recorded a vestige of the per-

sonal sentiments of the great dramatist. And, when we consider the fidelity with which traditions were then handed down in rural districts, can it henceforth be reasonably doubted that the poet gave expression from his death-bed to a special wish that his bones should for ever rest in peace?

That wish must, indeed, have been fervently expressed. It was no mere casual observation that could have induced the family to take such unusual precautions for the security of the remains; for, although the admeasurement given by Hall may be exaggerated,—numbers being of all things the most subject to error in all such early notices,—there can be no reasonable doubt from his statement that the grave was of a very exceptional depth. It should be recollected that, at the time the letter was written, that fact must have been well-known at Stratford-on-Avon, where the descendants of the Shakespeares were still residing, including amongst them George Hart, whose father had been personally acquainted with the poet and his family.

Hall's letter is also interesting in another respect. Before its discovery, the earliest known traditional notice of Shakespeare's wishes respecting his grave having been influenced by a

recollection of the charnel-house is one dated in July, 1777, in notes of a visit then made to Stratford-on-Avon,—“at the side of the chancel is a charnel-house almost filled with human bones, skulls, &c.,—the guide said that Shakespeare was so much affected by this charnel-house that he wrote the epitaph for himself to prevent his bones being thrown into it.” Here is a striking example of the accuracy with which local traditions were transmitted through long periods of time.

The writer of the letter, William Hall, was, observes Mr. Macray, when favoring me with the copy, “a Queen’s College man who took his degree of B.A. in October, 1694, and M.A. in July, 1697; he appears to have been a well-informed and zealous antiquary.” The addressee, Edward Thwaites, was a well-known Anglo-Saxon scholar.

J. O. HALLIWELL-PHILLIPPS.

Hollingbury Copse,  
Brighton,

14 June, 1884.



*A Copy of the Letter.*

Dear Neddy,

I very greedily embrace this occasion of acquainting you with something which I found at Stratford-upon-Avon. That place I came unto on Thursday night, and the next day went to visit the ashes of the great Shakespear which lye interr'd in that church. The verses which, in his lifetime, he ordered to be cut upon his tomb-stone, for his monument have others, are these which follow,—

Reader, for Jesus's sake forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed here ;  
Blessed be he that spares these stones,  
And cursed be he that moves my bones.

The little learning these verses contain would be a very strong argument of the want of it in the author, did not they carry something in them which stands in need of a comment. There is in this church a place which they call the bone-house, a repository for all bones they dig up, which are so many that they would load a great number of waggons. The Poet, being willing to preserve his bones unmoved, lays a curse upon him that moves them, and haveing to do with clarks and sextons, for the most part a very ignorant sort of people, he descends to the meanest of their capacitys, and disrobes himself of that art which none of his coteremporaries wore in greater perfection. Nor has the design mist of its effect, for, lest they should not only draw this curse upon themselves. but also entail it upon their posterity, they have laid him full seventeen foot deep, deep enough to secure him. And so much for Stratford, within a mile of which Sir Robinson lives, but it was so late before I knew, that I had not time to make him a visit.

Mr. Allen Hammond, the bearer hereof, my particular acquaintance and schoolfellow, upon Mr. Dean's recommendation designs for Queen's, and intends to have Mr. Waugh for his tutor. I desire that you would assist him in what you can as to a study, and make use of your interest with the senior poor children to be kind to him in what

concerns the going about the fires. My bed, which is in Pennington's chamber, I have ordered him to make use of, if he need one, and do desire you to help him to it.

Pray give my service to Jacky White, Harry Bird, and to all my Lichfield acquaintance, when you see them, and to all those also that shall ask after me. As for the Staffordshire words we talked of, I will take notice of them and send them. Pray let me hear from you at Mr. Hammond's man's return, wherein you will greatly oblige

Your friend and servant,  
WM. HALL.

Direct your letter for Wm. Hall, junr., at the White-hart in Lichfield.

*For Mr. Edward Thwaites  
in Queen's College  
in Oxon.*

**BRIGHTON :**

**PRINTED BY JOHN GEORGE BISHOP.**

**JUNE, 1884.**

*Fifty Copies only.*











